

# Final Assessment Report

## History Tri-University (MA, PhD)

### December 2014

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The Tri-University Graduate Programs in History is the joint program for graduate research and education operated by the history departments of the University of Guelph, Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Waterloo. It currently includes more than 60 core faculty members drawn principally from the history departments of the three universities, the University of Waterloo's colleges and Laurier's Brantford campus.

Founded in 1994, the Tri-University Doctoral Program in History admitted its first doctoral candidates in Fall Term of 1995. The new PhD program combined the two previously existing yet separate doctoral programs at the University of Guelph (established in 1966), the University of Waterloo (established in 1974), and integrated the faculty at Wilfrid Laurier University.

The success of the joint doctoral program led to the creation of the Tri-University Master's Program in 2001 that integrated the three existing Master's programs into the joint program. Prior to this consolidation, the separate Master's programs at all three universities had all been favourably reviewed. This change dramatically increased the number of students that the program was admitting and administering (the approximate total number of students at any given time since the 2007 OCGS appraisal is about 40 PhD students and 60 MA students with 10 to 15 incoming PhD and 40 to 50 incoming MA students each year).

The directorship of the program rotates between the three universities every three years. In 2013, it will move from the University of Waterloo to the University of Guelph. That process will repeat again in 2016, when it relocates to Wilfrid Laurier University. Given the dramatic increase in the size of the program, the departmental support staff at the University of Guelph (where the directorship resided from 2004 to 2007) hired an administrative assistant to participate in running the program. Thanks to the generosity of Guelph's History Department, the administrative side of the Tri-University Program has been housed in the Department of History at the Guelph campus since 2004. The department has paid for administrative expenses, including the use of a telephone, photocopiers, electricity and supplies. The department has also offered much-needed office and cabinet space for the program.

#### **Summary of Review Process**

Submission of Self-Study by Program: September 11, 2013

Site visit: January 27-29, 2014

Final Assessment Report received: February 21, 2014

Response of Director: received May 12, 2014

Response of Deans: received July 14, 2014

**Review Team:**

*External Reviewers:* Dr. Doris Bergen, Department of History, University of Toronto  
Dr. Jim Miller, Department of History, University of Saskatchewan

*Internal Reviewer:* Dr. Judith Cukier, Department of Geography, University of Waterloo  
Dr. Anthony Clarke (AVP Graduate Studies), University of Guelph  
Dr. Mark Eys, Department of Kinesiology, Wilfrid Laurier University

The Associate Provost, Graduate Studies, at the University of Waterloo selected the external reviewers from a list provided by the Tri-University History program director. Each of the partner universities appointed an internal reviewer who accompanied the external reviewers during the visit to their home university. The Review Team conducted a site review of the joint History graduate programs over three days on January 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>; the self-study report was provided prior to the visit. Their agenda included meetings with representatives of each institution (Waterloo, Guelph and Wilfrid Laurier), including: Associate Provost/AVP/Dean (Graduate Studies), Associate Deans (Graduate Studies) and Deans of Faculties; Department Chairs; Director of the Tri-University History Program; Faculty members, graduate students, and staff of the respective Departments, and Library staff. They were given a tour of the research facilities at each of the partner universities.

The External Reviewers, Dr. Doris Bergen and Dr. Jim Miller, submitted a very positive report on the Tri-University History (MA and PhD) programs. The Reviewers were impressed by the quality of the faculty and students: "Tri-U program benefits both from committed and enthusiastic graduate instructors and able and energetic students". They concluded that: "the Tri-University Graduate Program in History offers degrees programs of very good quality, and the organization of the Program, while it could be improved in certain of its details, is on the whole sound. The three institutions can be confident that they are supporting a tri-university program that operates in accordance with practices used at other good institutions and provide an education and training of high quality to its students."

The Reviewers made 23 generally minor recommendations under the following headings: Objectives, Administration Requirements, Curriculum, Teaching and Assessment, Resources, Quality Indicators, Additional Graduate Program Criteria, Quality Enhancement and Other. The Tri-U Program Director and the three program

Coordinators have discussed all of the Reviewers' suggestions in detail and will develop an implementation plan at the Tri-U Executive retreat in late autumn 2014. In this report responses to the Reviewers' recommendations have been combined under the following headings: Tri-U Program Objectives, Program Delivery and Logistical Matters.

### **Summary of Cyclical Program Review of the Tri-University History (MA AND PhD) Programs**

#### **Strengths**

- High quality of the faculty as measured by the number of publications.
- The Tri-university arrangement provides a critical mass of expertise, especially in the fields of War and Society and Canadian History.
- PhD students are provided the opportunity for mentored teaching of undergraduate courses
- Graduate Coordinators at each of the universities provide much appreciated support for students
- A well-run program.

#### **Weaknesses**

- A large number of fields (8) with limited expertise in some.
- Limited travel support for students commuting between campus for courses.
- Lack of office and study space for students at two of the universities: Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier.
- Limited professional preparation for non-academic careers.

### **Summary of the Reviewer's Recommendations with the Department's and Dean's Responses**

#### **Recommendations:**

Program Objectives. Recommendations 1, 5, 6, 18, 19, 21, 23 in the report focus on program objectives, clarification of administration requirements, and the presentation of the Program's strengths and weaknesses.

- Program administrators should make it clear in Program literature and policy statements that a vocational element is central to the nature and purpose of the PhD program.
- Presentation of the Program's strengths and successes should be updated and improved for both internal and external purposes. While it may not be necessary at this time to revise the major fields offered, the Tri-U historians

should be prepared to explain those fields and their rationale in more compelling ways.

- We recommend that the departmental chairs take seriously the need to help the Tri-U Program Director recruit minor field advisors. We also encourage the Tri-U Director and Graduate Coordinators to explore ways to help faculty develop a larger stake in the success of graduate students, including those for whom they are not the main supervisor.
- We recommend that the Program make it clear in the material it provides to applicants to the MA program that all research assignments – MRP or thesis – are to be based on research in primary sources.
- The Program Handbook is seriously in need of revision. We recommend the Tri-U Director work with Graduate Coordinators and perhaps TUGSA or other graduate students to update and revise the Handbook as soon as possible.
- We recommend that one meeting of a student's advisory committee be held per year, provided that the student is required to submit a progress report in advance of the meeting.
- We recommend that incoming students be provided with a brief introduction to the members of the Tri-U "team" so that they know to whom to turn regarding certain frequently asked questions. There should be some kind of orientation session where new graduate students meet the key people face-to-face.

*The program will work to improve and update individual department websites and the Tri-U website to reflect more accurately their strengths and revise the mission statement to make the program objectives more closely reflect current faculty expertise.*

*Revision of the MA and PhD handbooks are in progress and members of the Tri-U Graduate Student Association (TUGSA) and the TUGSA executive have been consulted.*

*Revising and updating the MA and PhD handbooks will resolve a number of the Reviewers' suggestions concerning communication across all 3 institutions.*

*Handbook revisions and updated websites will clarify the MA and PhD programs' objectives and requirements. There will be emphasis on how the PhD trains students for academic jobs and a stronger emphasis on the program's success in training PhDs for "vocational" positions in public history, the private sector, government, and nongovernmental organizations.*

*The revised handbook and website will direct incoming and in-program MA and PhD students to orientation dates; TUGSA events; the program newsletter (Triumvirate); information concerning deadlines for travel grants, conference funding, SSHRC and other scholarships; seminar training; and the annual Tri-U Conference. Revised handbooks will clarify questions concerning the pedagogical requirements of MA and PhD coursework, milestones, and syllabi. Other items for future discussion include the increasing cost of program administration, student's transportation costs, and the stress and strain on administrative staff. We agree with the Reviewers' additional suggestions (6,*

15) that the Tri-U Executive, which includes three department chairs, the Director, and three coordinators meet on a more regular basis and streamline communication.

Program Delivery. Recommendations 3, 7, 13, 14, 15 focus on curriculum, teaching and assessment.

- The departments should monitor the performance of their MA students and, if appropriate, reduce the intake, particularly at the bottom of the pool of applicants.
- We recommend that the Program institute examination of all three PhD fields.
- We recommend that the departments revisit the question of allowing MA students to take doctoral field-preparation seminars as seminars that earn credit in the MA in appropriate circumstances. Conversely, PhD students preparing fields in which MA courses are being offered could be encouraged to join in the MA seminar rather than working in isolation.
- Professors should make their syllabi available well in advance of the beginning of the course.
- We recommend that the three institutions provide resources to fund the grant for travel between the campuses at a substantially higher level. If necessary, the universities could offer the higher grants on an accountable basis.

*The PhD Handbook indicates that the purpose of the minor field is to “provide students with a supplementary teaching [at the undergraduate level] area and a comparative understanding of work in their dissertation research area.” Students work very hard in minor fields. They read the equivalent of 50 books, write an extensive research essay, and answer questions in field seminars. We believe that this is an adequate assessment of learning outcomes. An additional oral examination would add pressure to students struggling to complete the Program milestones in 4 years. MA and PhD students might benefit from interacting with each other in seminars, but the problem of isolation is relatively unusual. Moreover, PhD and MA students have separate needs and benefit from seminars, and major and minor fields, that are tailored to those needs. Indeed, the Program’s wide range of MA-only seminars and PhD-only field courses, made possible by the combined resources of the three departments, distinguishes it from most other programs in the country. That said, the Program does permit PhD students to sit in on MA seminars and some students and faculty may take advantage of this informal option. The Reviewers noted this flexibility as one of the Program’s strengths and an attribute appreciated by its students.*

Logistical Matters. Recommendations 2, 4, 6, 14, 16, 17, 18, 23 focus on logistical concerns: admission, library, and transportation.

- The several departments should investigate ways to smooth out the consultative phase of the admissions procedures.
- Communications with applicants should be coordinated so that they each receive only one letter of acceptance or one rejection from the Tri-U Program.
- We recommend that the departmental chairs take seriously the need to help the Tri-U Program Director recruit minor field advisors. We also encourage the Tri-U Director and Graduate Coordinators to explore ways to help faculty develop a larger stake in the success of graduate students, including those for whom they are not the main supervisor.
- Professors should make their syllabi available well in advance of the beginning of the course.
- We recommend that the librarians involved consider the difficulties that students reported concerning access to books, including e-books. We suggest that the administrators at all three institutions monitor how the work of resolving the problems with access to library resources proceeds.
- In addition to making their syllabi or at least reading lists available to prospective students well in advance of the beginning of term, field supervisors and course instructors should also work with librarians to ensure that the books are available, and if possible are on reserve in more than one of the Tri-U libraries.
- We recommend that the Program make it clear in the material it provides to applicants to the MA program that all research assignments – MRP or thesis – are to be based on research in primary sources.
- We recommend that incoming students be provided with a brief introduction to the members of the Tri-U “team” so that they know to whom to turn regarding certain frequently asked questions. There should be some kind of orientation session where new graduate students meet the key people face-to-face.

*The Tri-U Director and Graduate Officers feel that the consultation phase of the application process currently works very well. They appreciate the face-to-face meetings that provide the opportunity to become familiar with all incoming students and to match students with the most appropriate supervisors. It also provides the opportunity to monitor the progress of in-program students and faculty supervisory workloads and to envisage the most appropriate field-offerings for academic term.*

*The universities of Waterloo and Guelph have recently adopted online application systems (Laurier will do so soon). The initial disruption resulting from the introduction of this new system is over and application procedures are now running smoothly.*

*As recommended, the Director will send a comprehensive welcome letter to all students who accept their offers of admission with specific information on the pre-registration process, lists of courses and*

*information concerning how to contact supervisors and instructors with questions about syllabi.*

*The libraries at the three institutions are major stakeholders in the Tri-U Program. Library holdings will be monitored more closely. The integrated Tri-U library system (Trellis) has streamlined the ordering of books, which has reduced multiple book ordering. The program will work more closely with librarians to address the shortage of multiple copies of books. The program will advise Tri-U students to obtain Public Library cards and consult library reps for log-in options for off-campus borrowing. Field instructors will be made aware of this situation. Inherent in the Tri-U Program is the cost of transportation, a burden that falls most heavily on Guelph students. As recommended, the program will seek increased travel funding at all three institutions. In the interim, the program will continue to encourage ride-shares and carpooling.*